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On Life Cycle of Cultural Heritage Engineering Tourism: A Case Study of Macau

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Abstract

Recognized as one of the most influential and instrumental contributions by geographers to tourism studies, the Tourism Area Life Cycle model has long been subject to continuous application and modification, and meanwhile, cultural heritage tourism, especially the sustainability issue of it, has been increasingly drawing attention from researchers. Proceeding from the argument that not only is the TALC model a conceptual and managerial framework to be employed in tourist destinations, but it is also applicable to research of tourism products, this paper performed an empirical study on the life cycle of cultural heritage tourism with the study area of Macau, by means of such methods as literature study, field survey and in-depth interview. The affecting factors were identified and classified into categories of supply side and demand side, both of which were examined in detail. It was argued that distinctions of cultural heritage tourism lie in that the primary issues concerned are preservation and maintenance, rather than physical exploitation of the heritage resources, so the constructions normally concentrate on supporting facilities and creation of atmosphere in the destination, and that the combined factors of heritage value and government support often reduce the possibility of real decline. The life cycle of cultural heritage tourism was divided into four stages, namely, introduction, growth, maturity and consolidation, with characteristics and relevant strategies of each stage summarized. Accordingly, the evolution of cultural heritage tourism of Macau was illustrated, with its current status concluded at the beginning of maturity stage. In accordance with these findings, a series of development recommendations were proposed to enhance its sustainability, including to strengthen conservation efforts, to diversify marketing approaches through tourism engineering techniques, to deliver personalized service to tourists, and to rationalize the design of itineraries, and finally, discussion, as well as conclusion, was also presented to enlighten future research.

Keywords: Macau; cultural heritage Engineering tourism; life cycle; sustainability

1. Introduction

Life cycle, as a graphical tool, representing a succession of phases in a normally long period of time, can be a very relevant tool for monitoring several areas of knowledge [1], and one destination development model commonly used to explain the long-term evolution of tourism destinations is Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) [2]. According to this model, destinations progress through six stages of development: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation and each stage features a series of its own

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characteristics. Although a universal consensus about its validity and applicability has not yet been achieved, the TALC has generally proven to be a useful framework in explaining the dynamics of tourism development for a resort [3]. In the meantime, ensuring the sustainability of natural and cultural heritage resources is always considered as a strategic objective, in light of their outstanding and extraordinary value. As a unique category of tourist destinations, the issue whether the life cycle of heritage tourism sites has some special laws has aroused close attention from a number of scholars [4].

In recent years, Chinese tourism scholars have debated fiercely over whether the life cycle model should be employed in the study of tourist destinations or in the study of tourism products. The debate ended up with the majority of the scholars tending to accept the view that the objects of such studies should be tourist destinations, rather than tourism products [5]. Cultural heritage tourism of Macau, referring to learning and experiencing the history and the local culture of Macau through visiting its monuments, historic buildings and modern architectures and participating in local festivals and events, belongs to tourism product, which is produced cost-efficiently and based on the wise use of the cultural and natural resources of the destination to meet marketplace demands [6], as opposed to a destination. If so, is the life cycle model applicable to this study? The answer is definitely yes and the reason is two-fold. Firstly, life cycle is of wide applicability, and utilized by many disciplines for evolutionary processes similar to that of an organism, among which, the theory of product life cycle in marketing management is one of the most typical represents. Tourism product, as a package of tangible and intangible components such as attractions and environment, facilities and service, accessibility, images and prices, influenced by changing economic and social conditions, will inevitably cross the classical evolutionary phases of the life cycle as the tangible products and demonstrate the similar characteristics seen in the general theory of marketing [7]. Secondly, from the angles of supply and demand sides, a tourist destination can be defined as a combination of tourism products of different life cycles [8], and tourism product development is one major task for the planning and construction of a tourist destination, and will largely determine the success of the tourist destination. So it can be concluded that life cycles of tourist destinations and their tourism products co-exist simultaneously and are closely connected through the relationship of the whole to the part. Hence it is feasible and meaningful to study Macau cultural heritage tourism product as a tourism product.

2. Study area and methods

Situated opposite Hong Kong at the mouth of the Pearl River delta in southeastern China, Macau neighbors Zhuhai City of the most prosperous and populous Guangdong Province, to the north, and is surrounded by sea from the other three directions. It covers an area of 29.5km² and has a total population of approximately 5,422,000 [9]. As the pillar industry of Macau, tourism, including gambling-related activities, has always contributed to the robust growth and continuous prosperity of Macau's economy. Macau bears witness to the first and longest-lasting encounter between the West and China from the 16th till the 20th centuries, as the focal point for traders and missionaries, and the different fields of learning [10]. The fusion of different cultures had brought Macau a large number of world-class heritages that characterize the urban landscape.

In this paper, a combination of study methods was employed. Literature collection and collation served as the groundwork, reviewing the theories and analyzing the backdrop of cultural heritage tourism in Macau, as well as the tourists' awareness of such products; field surveys on the heritage sites were performed to understand the spatial relationship between different tourist attractions and the layout of the transportation facilities. In-depth interviews with both renowned scholars and tour operators in the locality were conducted to gain insight into the evolution and current status of cultural heritage tourism in Macau, especially the composition of the product.

3. Analysis on life cycle and current stage

3.1. Affecting factors

With a tourism attraction, the product (the destination) undergoes an evolutionary process of continual change in response to changes in demand and supply [11]. As a result, the affecting factors of tourism product life cycle has always been listed as attractiveness of the tourism resources, natural and social environment of the destination,

changes in the tourists' demand, strategies and guidelines of the operation [12]. Cultural heritage tourism in Macau, as a tourism product, is based on the unique and precious heritage resources and aimed at providing activities and services for tourists to admire the heritages and to experience the historic and social culture. With reference to the combined arguments above, the affecting factors of its life cycle are classified into two major categories: factors of supply side and factors of demand side, and a series of subcategories.

3.1.1 Factors of Supply Side

Researches have suggested that there are three main components to a heritage site's core product: atmosphere, learning and personal experience [13]. The essential value of cultural heritage tourism in Macau lies in the acquisition of the unique experience of city's culturally diverse feature, and the development of cultural heritage tourism in Macau is centered on the city's architectural heritage associated with its multi-culture composition. As for quantity, Macau is famed as "City of Museums" because it has the highest density of temples, churches and museums [14], and a large number of intangible cultural heritages in Macau were also recognized as unique and high in value; as for diversity, it owns architectures of assorted styles, including Portuguese castles, traditional Chinese temples and baroque churches, etc; as for quality, the Historic Center of Macau, serving as the key element in the cultural heritage tourism of Macau, was recognized by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage in the year 2005, which symbolized the most authoritative international recognition of Macau for its multi-cultural tourism resources; as for uniqueness, the cultural assets inherited from the past are irreproducible and highly specific to the local historical and cultural context; hence substitutability and competition from others is limited [15].

Efforts have long been made by Macau government to develop cultural heritage tourism, especially in marketing promotion and legislation, and have borne rich fruits. After the takeover in 1999, former chief Edmund Ho Hau-wah (2008) pointed out in the Annual Policy Address that as the booster of Macau's economy, gaming and tourism shoulder the responsibility to stimulate other industries due to their strong sectoral linkages, and MICE, as well as cultural tourism, will represent the new orientations [16]. In the year 2006, Macau Tourist Office launched the slogan "A World of Difference, The Difference is Macau" to establish the image of Macau as a cultural heritage tourism destination, and won the gold award for its initiatives in cultural heritage tourism from the Pacific Asia Travel Association. In the aspect of preservation, Macau government spares no efforts either, and the drafting of Cultural Heritage Protection Law is just one example. Besides, such non-for-profit and non-governmental organizations as Macau World Heritage Promotion Association and Macau Heritage Ambassadors Association were established, to publicize the value of heritages in Macau and promote cultural heritage tourism of Macau, while the issue of sustainable use of heritage resources through preservation is also on the top agenda.

3.1.2 Factors of Demand Side

Study on factors of demand side mainly refers to the analysis and evaluation of the scale and the structure of the source market. As a highly internationalized city, Macau has established a complete transportation network through the sea, the land and the air. Although not high-volume operation, it is still able to provide great convenience and free choices for inbound tourists. The improvement of the transportation facilities has made Macau accessible for larger markets. Taking air transportation for example, starting from Macau Airport, it is possible to reach a market of 1.5 billion people within two hours, and a five-hour journey can reach a market of 3 billion people. On the other hand, thanks to the simplification of crossing-border procedures by Macau SAR government, the inbound tourist arrivals to Macau have always been on a consistent increase and for instance, the tourist arrivals reached record high of 27,003,370 in 2007[9]. According to the findings from the interview with Associate Professor Lam Fat Iam, however, it is generally accepted that out of ten tourists to Macau, even their major motivation is for gambling, roughly eight out of them will visit the Historic Center of Macau, and hence can be perceived as cultural heritage tourists in general. It is because both of the reputation of this heritage site and the short distance between it and the major accommodation or leisure establishments. Similarly, according to Wu's questionnaire survey (2006), 40.3 per cent of the respondents traveled to Macau with the major purpose of visiting cultural heritages, a percentage smaller only to that of the purpose for leisure and entertainment. And as many as 99.3 per cent of the respondents had visited or would visit the historic or religious sites in Macau. Explanation behind such high percentages lies in that the survey was conducted in heritage sites of Macau [17].

Macau features a harmonious combination of multiple cultures, so it lives up to the expectations of both domestic and foreign tourists who are in search of exotic cultural experience. As for the current makeup of the whole tourist market of Macau, the East Asian market occupies a dominant proportion of over 90%, due to the similar cultural background, generic historic origin, favorable geographic proximity and close kindred relations. Within the East

Asian market, mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan market constitute the majority. Mainland Chinese tourists, in particular, represent over half of the total source market, with both of their average stay length and consumption much higher than those of other inbound tourists, which is mainly attributed to the rapid and continuous economic growth of mainland China, the implementation of self-guided tour policy for Hong Kong and Macau, and more paid vacations for mainland Chinese residents.

3.2 Identification of the life cycle stage

From the moment it is launched on the market to the moment of its disappearance from the market arena, a tourism product normally moves through its succession of the following stages: introduction, growth, maturity, and decline, known as the life cycle. Cultural heritage tourism development is a deliberate process involving a series of activities with specific objectives and through detailed procedures, hence the obvious temporal order and characteristics will be fully shown. Cultural heritage tourism development differs than that of other forms of tourism in that preservation and maintenance is given first priority, and the major task is construction of supporting facilities and creation of destination environment, rather than exploitation of the heritage resources themselves [18].

Thanks to the deep noncopyable cultural connotations, cultural tourism has wide and long-lasting attractiveness, and will rarely see drastic fluctuations, in absence of unexpected occurrences [19]. It will normally step into the stage of maturity and consolidation under certain socioeconomic conditions, and would stay in the stage continuously in the long run, as long as the sound tourism image is maintained, the visitation volume is well controlled, and all negative impacts are avoided [20].

With reference to the common theory of tourism product life cycle, the characteristics and possible strategies in each stage of the life cycle which are fairly universal to all cultural heritage tourism products can be summarized, as is shown in Table 1. Against this table, a review of the development process of Macau cultural heritage tourism and a projection of its future trend have resulted in the summarization of its evolution and illustration of the features as well as the strategies in different stages of the life cycle, as is shown in Fig.1.

The cultural heritages of Macau have enjoyed a time-honored history, while the potential of Macau to develop cultural heritage tourism was first brought to light in 1980, when PATA performed a research scheme on tourism of Macau, which highlighted the cultural and cultural heritage tourism resources of Macau and provided a series of input with regard to development of cultural heritage tourism and preservation of cultural heritages in Macau. The deliberate initiative of the Macau SAR Government to launch cultural heritage tourism can be traced back to the early 1990s, when the government devised a series of promotional slogans, signaling the “introduction” of Macau cultural heritage tourism. In this phase, influenced by the traditional mindset of strict preservation, maintenance and protection of resources was given first priority and development efforts were scarce. As a landmark in the history of Macau, returning to Chinese administration in the year 1999 also brought Macau both great fame and large numbers of tourists from mainland China, and since then, application for world heritage designation had been processed in full swing, and finally, the Historic Center of Macau was recognized as a world cultural heritage in 2005. In the following endeavors, holding of such high-profile events as World Heritage Year of Macau, International Tourism and World Heritage Travel Expo, and World Heritage Forum, had provided a showcase for the rest of the world to have a better understanding of cultural heritages in Macau. During this growth stage and till present, cultural heritage tourism has been accepted by most tourists, but the spectrum of it was far less than adequate. Itineraries organized by local tour operators are mainly featuring so-called “two spots and one point”, namely, Ruins of St. Paul, A-Ma Temple and one casino. This is an evidence that the cultural heritage tourism is only concentrated on very few “hot spots” and sightseeing is the major activity on these sites, given the one-and-a-half-day average length of stay, so more interactive and participatory experience was required [21]. This phenomenon was also echoed by the research of Li (2009) on tourists’ awareness, finding that the heritage resources in Macau as a whole are well-known to tourists, but the degrees of popularity vary widely from site to site, and that tourists, especially those from Hong Kong and Taiwan, have demand for more art performance featuring local culture [22]. The year 2009 was so significant for cultural heritage tourism of Macau that it could be seen as the start of the maturity stage. In that year, Cultural Heritage Tour Guide Association of Macau was established, a move to deeper exploit the essence of heritage resources in Macau for tourists through providing quality guiding service. The Cultural Heritage Protection Law was drafted and announced to public for amendment recommendations, reflecting the intensified efforts for heritage preservation. In the same year, the Outline of the Plan for the Reform and Development of the Pearl River Delta (2008-2020) gave Macau the position as a global center of tourism and recreation, which will inevitably

stimulate further diversified tourism development and cultural heritage tourism will gain more impetus. Also in the year, tour coach route connecting Macau and Kaiping was put into use, and more visitors are expected through the combined attractiveness of the two sites. From present to the future stage of consolidation, it can be predicted that, guided by the principle of preservation and sustainable use, the government would strength the efforts in construction of necessary facilities, digging deeper and further for the value of the cultural heritages from scientific, aesthetic, historic and cultural aspects. By then, a comprehensive functional system of admiration, education and scientific research would be established and completed. Besides for the paramount and unique value of these

Table 1 Characteristics and strategies in life cycle stages of cultural heritage tourism

Stages	Characteristics and strategies
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low publicity of both the activity and the site, - Scarce visitation with well-educated visitors as the major component, - Inadequate infrastructure and facilities for tourism, - Large investment on marketing promotion and publicity, - Informative advertising
Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increasing awareness among the public, - Tourist market taking shape, - Rapid and extended construction of supporting facilities, - Sound environment and atmosphere for tourists
Maturity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility to a market of general scope, - More improved supporting facilities and service, - Deeper exploitation of scientific, aesthetic, historic and cultural value of the heritage resources [23], - More emphasis on sustainability issues and the balance between preservation and utilization - Persuasive advertising
Consolidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Saturation of tourist market and leveled off demand, - Innovation of itineraries, activities and marketing, - Prospective rejuvenation through innovations, - Reminder-oriented advertising

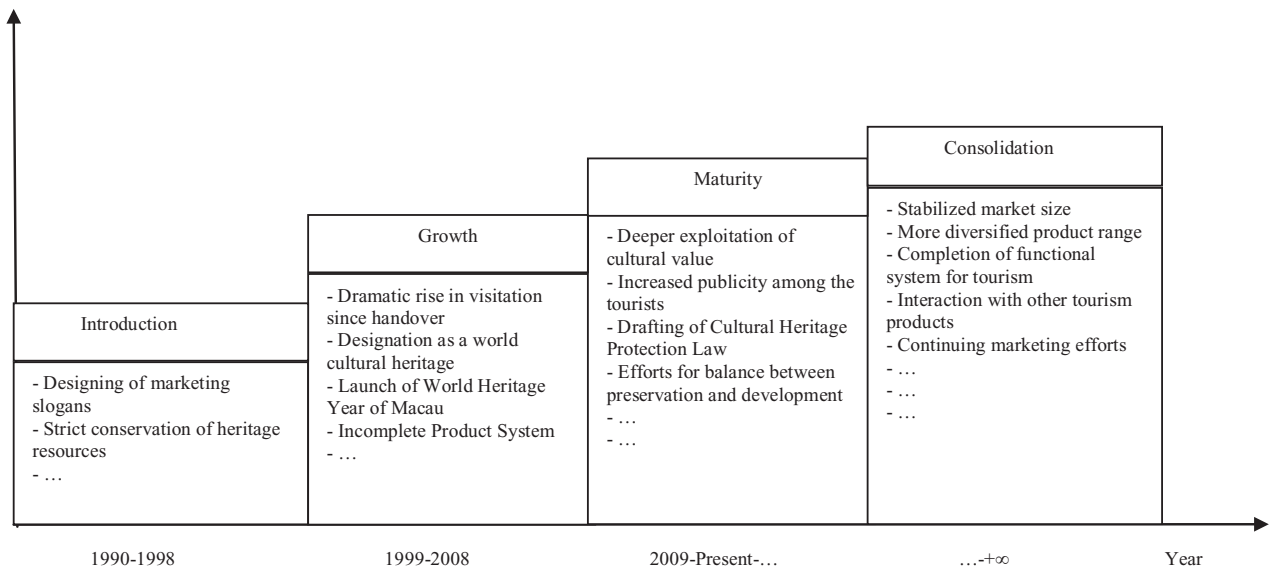


Fig. 1 Life Cycle of Cultural Heritage Tourism of Macau

heritage resources, the real decline of cultural heritage tourism in Macau is also economically and politically unacceptable, given the strong reliance of the city on tourism development at present and its future transformation towards a more diversified development pattern beyond gaming economy. To achieve the permanent stability of cultural heritage tourism in Macau, scientific planning and careful construction, and the balance between preservation and development should be actualized, and the specific measures are recommended in the following part.

4. Recommendations

4.1 To Strengthen the Conservation Efforts

The end result of the adoption of sustainability strategies must include measures for the conservation and protection of the environment [24], and in order for cultural heritage tourism of Macau to develop orderly, stably and continuously, the sustainable use of cultural heritage resources must be ensured, otherwise, degradation of resources will inevitably result in decline of tourism. So the mechanism of scientific preservation for cultural heritage resources should be established, and the government should put more efforts into related legislation, enlarge investment on maintenance and conservation, and especially strengthen the measures responding such emergencies as fire and typhoon.

4.2 To Diversify the Marketing Approaches

Inside the city, approaches for introduction and publicity of cultural heritage tourism are still insufficient, especially compared with the overwhelming hype for casinos and hotels. Besides the posters in the outdoor facilities and buildings, closed-circuit television could also be installed to coaches, taxis and shuttle buses to broadcast programs featuring cultural heritages of Macau. Conferences, exhibitions, and festivals are other instrumental platforms showcasing these attractions. Tourism engineering techniques could also be applied to assume the control of all the marketing mix variables either general or tourism oriented.

4.3 To Deliver Personalized Service

At present, service issues mainly concentrate on the aspect of information provision, including construction of information centers for visitors, completion of road signs, enrichment of brochures and enhancement of personnel introduction and interpretation, in an effort to make the tourists better informed of the details involved in travel and more aware of the knowledge about the destination.

4.4 To Rationalize the Design of Itineraries

As countermeasures to imbalance between spots in visitation, more introduction to the value of the heritages should be in place to attract tourists. Government officials, scholars and tour operators should join efforts in brainstorming, to launch more itineraries, connecting various heritage resources. The tourists will be guided to experience the heritage value in greater depth, and the tourist flow can be dispersed both spatially and temporally. In the future initiative, emphasis should be laid on promotion of festivals and events featuring religious and folk culture, and other intangible heritages. Tourists' interaction with and participation in such activities should be facilitated, to make up for the insufficiency of experience currently confined to that from sightsee alone.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

An analysis on the life cycle of cultural heritage tourism of Macau and its current status will serve as the scientific basis for prediction of its future trend and formularization of strategies to promote its stable and continuous development. The explanation of life cycle of common cultural heritage tourism in this paper should be of universal application, and there is still room for further discussion and research with regards to the specific realities of Macau.

For instance, in such a tiny compact tourist destination, connections and interactions inevitably exist between different tourist activities, so a study on the life cycle of cultural heritage tourism of Macau separately without touching its association with such other tourist activities as gaming, MICE, vacation and shopping leaves something to be desired. In addition, the loss of visitation statistics as a significant indicator in identification of life cycle stages, given the difficulty distinguishing real heritage tourists and others, will easily arouse controversy. It is hoped that these problems will be well addressed in near future.

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